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Mexican American Teen-Age School Dropouts: Reasons for Leaving School and Orientations Toward Subsequent Educational Attainment.

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In an effort to determine variables related to Mexican American school dropouts' decisions to quit school and their orientations toward further educational attainment, personal interviews were conducted in 1967 with 74 Mexican American high school dropouts residing in 4 rural south Texas counties. The variables examined included (1) decision to become a dropout (reasons for leaving school, encouragement to stay in school, encouragement to return to school after leaving), and (2) orientations toward further education (aspirations, expectations, and attitudes toward re-entry into school under various conditions). It was found that poor grades and financial difficulties were major factors in the decision to leave school. While few respondents were encouraged to stay in school, three-fourths were advised by parents and friends to return to school after leaving. Most respondents desired high school diplomas; however, one-half of the boys and one-fourth of the girls did not expect to attain their goals. Most respondents were uncertain about expectations. It was recommended that dropouts be identified early, and that teachers, principals, and counselors make every attempt to encourage the potential dropout to remain in school. A major conclusion was that much needs to be done in developing educational programs to meet perceived needs of these students. (DA)

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MEXICAN AMERICAN TEEN-AGE SCHOOL DROPOUTS: REASONS FOR LEAVING SCHOOL AND ORIENTATIONS TOWARD SUBSEQUENT EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT*

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to report information about Mexican American school dropouts' decisions to quit school and their orientations toward further educational attainment, utilizing data obtained in 1967 from personal interviews with 74 Mexican American teen-age dropouts residing in four rural south Texas counties. More specifically, we examined the following variables: (1) decision to become a dropout--reasons for leaving school, encouragement to stay in school, encouragement to return after leaving; (2) orientations toward further education--aspirations, expectations, and attitudes toward re-entry into school under varying conditions.

Mexican American dropouts indicated that poor grades and money were important considerations in their decisions to leave school. While few respondents were encouraged to stay in school (mostly by parents), three-fourths were encouraged to return to school, by parents and friends mostly. Most of the respondents desired high school graduation or even higher levels of education. However, about one-half of the boys and one-fourth of the girls actually did not expect to attain their goals. What is more, a majority of the respondents were uncertain about their expectations. A majority of boys and girls desired to return and finish school, but markedly fewer anticipated doing so. A majority of both sexes replied that they would return to school, and most of these would go back without being paid for it. Relevant conclusions and implications were drawn.

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INTRODUCTION

Willard Wirtz has called them the "outlaw pack", James B. Conant has described them as "social dynamite", and Lucius Cervantes has referred to them as "the minority of tomorrow".[1] Are these well known and respected citizens of our country throwing stones at the Communists, the Mafia, SDS, or black militants? No! They are attempting to call attention to the serious problem of the school dropout in our society. Daniel Schreiber, who has been a school adminstrator in Harlem and directed a school dropout project for the National Education Association, states in a recent book, "Today, it is impossible not to see the problem of the school dropout as the keystone of a conglomeration of problems which threaten to overwhelm the stability of America's existence."[2] Is he being overly dramatic? Maybe, but not in the opinion of a number of other interested public officials and social scientists.

There is wide consensus that the school dropout problem is critical and is becoming more so over time.[3] The increasing severity of the problem is not due to the proportional increase in the numbers of dropouts--for they are actually declining relative to the total population--but is due to the increasing negative consequences of the status of "dropout" itself.[4] Our achievement-oriented society, in its religious-like zeal to institutionalize a universal mode of social and economic achievement, has made formal education something resembling the sacred, and, in the process, has made the dropout an American pariah. Lucius Cervantes in his new book about dropouts describes the situation well: "Today the United States is itself creating its own wretched refuse, its own disadvantaged minority... At the same time that the United States is proving itself the assimilator of racial and ethnic unassimilables, there appears on the economic horizon the growing figure of a new minority which well may prove unassimilable."[5]

The consequences of having this negative and degrading social label today is crushing in its impact on life chances. While the negative stigma associated with the status label of dropout is a difficult enough burden to bear, those filling this position in our society are more often unemployed and, when employed, face a lack of any kind of job security and extremely low wages. Is it any wonder then that the vast majority of those incarcerated in our "correctional institutions" are school dropouts?[6] Secretary of Labor Wirtz indicated that the inability of our economy to absorb the dropout is "one of the most explosive social problems in the nation's history".[7] Our inability to come to grips with this new emerging minority group involves great societal costs: in wasted human resources and talent, in the cost of providing support for dropouts and their families, in the cost of supporting untold numbers in resocialization programs of various kinds, in the untold amounts of personal and social frustration that evolve from the plights of these individuals, and in the accumulations of social stresses that all of this produces.

It is obvious that the burden of dropout status falls doubly hard on those from ethnic minorities. This produces double negative rank evaluation that makes assimilation and upward mobility truly a "dream" and not a probability. The vast majority of the Mexican American ethnic group in our Southwest, particularly in Texas, suffer this compound status disadvantage. According to the 1960 U.S. Census, only 12 percent of the Spanish-speaking population in Texas had graduated from high school.[8] While this situation has undoubtedly changed markedly during the past decade--and while it is anyone's guess as to what the dropout figure for the Spanish-speaking population of Texas is currently--there is little question that many, if not most, Mexican American youth do not complete high school today. While increasing attention has been given to the dropout problem generally, almost no published data is available on Mexican American dropouts.[9]

There is clearly a need for factual information on the Mexican American dropout. Thus, it is our intention in this paper to make a beginning in meeting this need by reporting findings on Mexican American dropouts' decisions to quit school and their orientations toward further education, utilizing data obtained from a 1967 study of 74 teenage dropouts residing in rural south Texas.

REVIEW OF PAST RESEARCH

Recent interest in the dropout problem has developed in the past decade and probably was stimulated by the late President Kennedy's "War on Poverty" and 1963 campaign to get dropouts back in school. Consequently, numerous research investigations have accumulated on the dropout problem.[10] However, most of the relevant empirical research has been aimed at describing the background of the dropouts, the age and grade levels at which they leave school, and their reasons for leaving school. We located only a few studies which involved dropouts' orientations toward further educational attainment or re-entry into school. What is more, relative to the specific concern of this paper, absolutely nothing of substance exists on the problem of the Mexican American dropouts.

Prior studies indicate that most dropouts leave school between the ages of 16 and 17, usually just before, during, or immediately following the ninth grade.[11] Numerous studies demonstrate that dropouts give many reasons for leaving school; however, the most salient appear to be financial motives and dissatisfaction with the school per se.[12] Other important factors are: not being accepted by other students, inability to see the value of education, and social correlates of low socio-economic status, including low educational attainment of parents and family instability.

While little research has directly focused on dropout differentials by such objective variables as socio-economic status, place of residence, and ethnicity, there is some evidence to indicate that dropout rates are higher among the lower income groups and, consequently, are higher for ethnic minorities and residents of economically deficient rural areas.[13] (As has been mentioned previously, aggregate population statistics on level of educational attainment among ethnic groups in Texas clearly indicate that Mexican Americans have a relatively high incidence of failure to complete high school.) Pertaining to sex differences, existing evidence suggests that girls tend to drop out at a higher grade level than boys.[14] Also, girls more often than boys give marriage as a reason for dropping out, and boys more frequently indicate desire for a job.[15]

What little empirical data that exists on dropouts' orientations toward future educational attainment indicates that most dropouts aspire to at least graduate from high school,[16] but that most do not expect to attain this goal.[17] A national study indicates that dropouts view their exit from school as a terminal status transition and that their occupational aspirations conform to this evaluation.[18] Also, information exists to indicate that large numbers can be persuaded to return to school, but most of these consequently drop out again after a short time.[19]

As pertains to Mexican American youth, we know little more than that, according to the work of C.S. Heller, "the dropout problem is especially acute among Mexican Americans but has not been studied sufficiently."[20]

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

As part of a larger project concerned with investigation of status projections of low-income youth, we interviewed some 600 Mexican American sophomores attending school in four south Texas counties.[21] At this time, we were struck by the tendency of past studies on adolescents' aspirations and expectations to exclude dropout age-peers, thereby limiting the scope of the generalizations that could be drawn regarding all youth. As a result, we decided to attempt to include in our study of Mexican American youth dropout age-peers of our sophomore respondents. Subsequently, we interviewed 74 Mexican American teenage dropouts in this study area. It is from these respondents that the data to be reported here were obtained.

Our broad research objectives were to investigate, within the context of our data, the dropouts' decisions to leave school and, secondly, their orientations toward further educational attainment. More precisely, we had data available for analysis on the following variables: (1) decisions to drop out which included importance of reasons for leaving school, sources of encouragement to stay in school, sources of encouragement to return to school after leaving; and, (2) orientations toward further educational attainment including aspirations, expectations, and attitudes toward school re-entry under varying conditions.

PROCEDURES AND RESPONDENTS

Procedures

To obtain a list of the dropouts, we asked the sophomores that we interviewed as a part of the Spring 1967 study to note on the back of the questionnaire they had completed names and addresses of anyone about their age living in their local area but not attending school. This strategy produced a list of 135 youth that was used as a starting point for the location and interviewing of the dropout age-peers within the stud, area.

Subsequently, during the summer of 1967, a research assistant of Mexican American descent spent several weeks locating each of the dropout prospects and contacting them for permission to be interviewed at a later date.[22] The following January, letters were sent to each prospective respondent indicating that interviewers would contact them in February. During February of 1968, 82 school dropouts were interviewed by trained personnel,[23] but only 74 were judged usable for our study.[24] The questionnaire was administered under a wide variety of conditions; in many cases, we found it difficult to maintain the kind of privacy we deemed desirable for personal interviews without harming the rapport and perhaps losing the cooperation of the respondent.[25]

The stimulus questions and modes of measurement to be utilized in this analysis will be discussed at relevant points in the presentation of findings. Exact reproductions of the questionnaire instruments are provided in Appendix B.

Respondents

The four counties involved in our investigation were selected on the basis of several criteria: a high proportion of Mexican Americans, a low level of mean family income, and a high proportion of rural residency in nonmetropolitan areas. (See Appendix A, Tables 1 and 2.)

Almost all of the respondents were at least 16 years old at the time of the interview--mean age at time of interview was 17 and a half years--and only ten were married. On the average, the respondents indicated that they left school at 16 years of age, and the eighth grade was the last school year they completed. More than half of our respondents indicated that they had left school before completing the ninth grade. These findings on age and grade of leaving school are in general agreement with findings about other youth.[26]

Pertaining to the family background of our respondents, three-fourths indicated that their parents were both alive and living together, and almost as many said they were living with their parents at the time they left school. The vast majority of their parents (75%) failed to complete high school, and about two-thirds of the main breadwinners in their families were either unemployed or employed in low skilled blue collar jobs (mostly farm labor or food processing).

Only a few of the respondents interviewed had received any type of technical training since leaving school--mostly through the Neighborhood Youth Corps--and the vast majority of this was "training" for unskilled types of work. Of particular interest in illuminating part of the problem these youth faced in school is the fact that they spoke Spanish more than English in the home--7 out of 10 spoke Spanish with their parents. In addition, the majority spoke at least as much Spanish as English with their friends in the neighborhood or at work. In this regard, an important sex difference was observed: while a majority of boys spoke Spanish only with their friends, markedly fewer girls (about one-third) indicated this.

Our informal observations made during the interview sessions should also help provide some understanding of the type of situation facing these youth. Almost all of them came from very large families often crowded together in dwellings of two or three rooms. Rarely were any reading materials observable in their homes and very often even television sets appeared to be absent. In many cases, abject poverty was observable in the dilapidated nature of the external structure and internal furnishings of the home and in the extremely poor clothing worn by the children. All in all, it would be safe to conclude that almost every respondent involved here had little or no opportunity for privacy in the home and could not have received much in the way of financial resources from his family for school considerations.

This general description of the background of the respondents should help in drawing inferences from our findings and in ascertaining the extent to which they are similar or different from respondents involved in other studies. Only a brief overview of the students' background characteristics and conditions was provided here; detailed tabular presentations on the variables utilized appear in Appendix A.

FINDINGS

The results of our analysis are to be presented in two sections. The first provides results relative to factors associated with the decision to become a dropout, and the second pertains to variables about the respondents' orientations toward future educational attainment. Although it was not our intention to examine sex differences, tabulations of data are presented by sex because inspection of preliminary data indicated substantial differences existed on some variables.

The Decision to Drop Out

Reasons for Dropping Out

The respondents were asked to rate the degree of importance of involvement of several alternative reasons influencing their decisions to leave school. The reasons provided in a forced choice type instrument included those pertaining to the school situation per se, those representing social pressure outside the school, and those pertaining to financial motivations or marriage, Table 1. In case a student had a relatively unique motive not covered by the alternatives, we also provided him with the opportunity to write in other reasons as a free response. Careful examination of free responses indicated they were usually reiterations of alternatives already provided in the structured instrument, Table 2.

Table 1. Mexican American Dropouts' Ratings of Importance of Reasons for Leaving School

Reasons	Percentage Indicating Some or Much Importance: Male (N=39)	Female (N=35)	Chi Square*	P
School Related:				
Couldn't get along with teachers	31	26	.23	P>.50<.70
Had poor grades	39	68	6.20	P>.01<.02
Wasn't learning anything I could use	44	26	2.32	P>.10<.20
The principal or school counselor told me to leave	7	3	.84	P>.30<.50
Other students didn't like me	15	15	.02	P>.80<.90
Social Pressure Outside of School:				
My father wanted me to quit	11	9	.08	P>.70<.80
My mother wanted me to quit	3	3	.0037	P>.95<.98
My friends wanted me to quit	5	3	.27	P>.50<.70
Financial/Home:				
To make some money	51	31	2.99	P>.05<.10
Didn't have good enough clothes or money to do what other students did	30	21	.98	P>.30<.50
To get married	11	14	.24	P>.50<.70
Other reasons	61	68	.22	P>.50<.70

*d.f. = 1 in all cases

Table 2. Other Reasons Stated for Leaving School

	Male (N=39)	Female (N=35)
	-------Percent--------	
To Supplement Family Income or to Help at Home	26	31
Dislike School	10	11
Pregnant	0	6
Miscellaneous reasons	13	3
None	39	32
No Information	12	17
TOTAL	100	100

In general, school related motives were most important in the girls' decisions to leave school, with poor grades being the most important single reason, Table 1. On the other hand, the boys more frequently indicated financial reasons as important in their decisions -- "to make some money" appeared to have the greatest level of importance. For both boys and girls, these two categories of motives (school and financial factors) were clearly the most important reasons for dropping out. Among school related reasons, problems with teachers, poor grades and a lack of appreciation for subject matter were given importance by substantial numbers of the respondents. Relative to the financial category, making money and a concern about having good enough clothes or money for school were also indicated by substantial proportions of the students. Few students indicated social pressure from inside or outside the school as being important to their decision, and few indicated that they left because they wanted to get married.

Social Pressure to Stay In School

Only about one-fourth of our respondents indicated that they were encouraged to stay in school, Table 3. Of this minority, parents were indicated to have more frequently offered encouragement to stay in school than other social contacts. At the same time, considering the total number of respondents, parents were reported to have encouraged only about one out of every ten dropouts to remain in school, Table 4. It is very interesting and perhaps enlightening to point out that extremely few respondents indicated that teachers or principals encouraged them to remain in school. It would seem that, although the teachers or principals were not actively involved in pushing the students out of school, neither were they particularly active in attempting to restrain them from leaving.

Table 3. Encouragement of Mexican American Dropouts to Stay in and to Return to School

	To Stay*		To Return**	
	Male (N=39)	Female (N=35)	Male (N=39)	Female (N=35)
	----------Percent----------			
Yes	26	23	72	86
No	74	77	28	14
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

*x^2 = .08 d.f. = 1 P >.70 <.80
**x^2 = 2.11 d.f. = 1 P >.10 <.20

Table 4. Persons Who Encouraged Mexican American Dropouts to Stay in and to Return to School

	To Stay		To Return	
	Male (N=39)	Female (N=35)	Male (N=39)	Female (N=35)
	----------Percent----------			
Parent(s)	10	11	23	23
Brother or Sister	5	0	3	0
Relative	3	0	5	6
Friend(s)	0	6	13	29
Teacher or Principal	5	3	10	8
More than One of the Above	3	3	15	20
None	74	77	28	14
No Information	0	0	3	0
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

In marked contrast to the general lack of social pressures to remain in school, a vast majority of both boys and girls indicated they received encouragement to return to school, Table 3. For almost every category of social pressure--parents, relatives, friends, school personnel--more respondents indicated social pressure to return to school than indicated encouragement from these sources to stay in school in the first place. For the boys, parents provided encouragement to return to school more often than others, while for the girls, friends, parents, and a c[illegible]ation of several sources were about equally important. It is certainly eye-opening to observe that while approximately three-fourths of the respondents were never encouraged to stay in school by anyone, relatively small proportions failed to receive social pressure to return to school once they had left.

Orientations Toward Further Education

Responses indicating the ultimate long range educational aspirations and expectations of the respondents were elicited through the following questions: aspiration --"If you could have as much schooling as you desired, which of the following would you do?"; and, expectation--"What do you really expect to do about your education?" The structured alternatives provided for a response are indicated in Appendix B.

The majority of the respondents--almost all the girls--indicated an aspiration to return to school, most of these desiring simply to graduate from high school, Table 5. Nevertheless, substantial minorities (about one-third) desired training or education beyond high school graduation. For the most part, the girls' expectations were very similar to their aspirations. However, the boys demonstrated a marked pattern of negative deflection from goals to expectations. Substantially

Table 5. Educational Aspirations and Expectations of Mexican American Dropouts

	Aspirations*		Expectations**	
	Male (N=39)	Female (N=35)	Male (N=39)	Female (N=35)
	Percent			
Never Go to School Again	28	11	41	17
High School Graduate	41	51	33	49
High School Graduate Plus Additional Training	13	23	23	14
College Graduate	18	15	0	20
No Information	0	0	3	0
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

*x^2 = 4.21 d.f. = 3 P >.20 <.30

**x^2 = 13.12 d.f. = 3 P >.001 <.01

Table 6. Mexican American Dropouts' Certainty of Educational Expectation

	Male (N=39)	Female (N=35)	Total (N=74)
	Percent		
Certain	46	20	34
Not very certain	38	68	53
Uncertain	13	12	12
No Information	3	0	1
TOTAL	100	100	100

x^2 = 7.00 d.f. = 3 P >.05 <.10

more boys expected than desired never to go to school again. And while 18 percent desired to become college graduates, none expected to attain this status. Insight into the tenuous nature of these status projections, particularly anticipated status attainments, is gained by observing these youth's feelings of certainty in regard to their anticipated attainments. Fully six out of every ten felt uncertain about the possibility of attaining their educational expectations, Table 6.

Attitudes Toward Re-Entry

In order to determine the respondents' actual intentions about further education, the following questions were asked about their desires and anticipations of re-entering school: "Would you like to go back and finish high school sometime?" and "Do you really think you will ever go back to high school and try to graduate?" (See Appendix B for structured alternatives included with the question.)

A higher proportion of the dropouts replied they neither desired nor expected to return to school, as compared with those who previously indicated an aspiration or expectation for further education. (Compare Tables 5 and 7.) Nevertheless, a majority of the youth indicated a definite desire to return to school. Compared to the relatively low proportion (17 percent) of females who earlier replied they expected never to go to school again, a majority responded negatively to the question about re-entry. The same pattern existed for the boys, but it was less dramatic. The inconsistencies in the responses given for ultimate status projection indicators on the one hand and the re-entry indicators on the other hand are rather puzzling. Possible explanations may exist in the intention elements involved in re-entry, which may indicate a more realistic perspective, as compared with the ultimate nature of the projection indicators. Another possibility is that the re-entry questions elicited an orientation toward the particular school the student had left and brought up negative associations he had previously developed toward this school.

Table 7. Desire and Expectation of Mexican American Dropouts to Return and Finish School

	Desire*		Expectation**	
	Male (N=39)	Female (N=35)	Male (N=39)	Female (N=35)
	Percent			
To Return:				
Full-time	23	20	15	17
Part-time	28	57	10	26
Not to Return	44	23	67	57
No Information	5	0	8	0
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

*x^2 = 6.05 d.f. = 2 P >.02 <.05

**x^2 = 2.70 d.f. = 2 P >.20 <.30

Table 8. Conditions Under Which Mexican American Dropouts Would Return to School

	Full-time*		Part-time**	
	Male (N=39)	Female (N=35)	Male (N=39)	Female (N=35)
	Percent			
Would not go back under any conditions	38	37	38	23
Would go back only if paid for it	21	20	16	11
Would go back without being paid for it	36	40	38	60
No Information	5	3	8	6
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

*x^2 = .07 d.f. = 2 P >.95 <.98

**x^2 = 3.41 d.f. = 2 P >.20 <.30

Involved in the re-entry stimulus questions were conditional aspects regarding the situation of returning to school full-time or part-time (see Appendix B). The boys were about equally divided in both their desires and expectations in regard to returning full-time or part-time, but the girls demonstrated a marked preference for returning part-time and a slightly greater anticipation of doing so, Table 7. In addition, the respondents were asked a question attempting to get at whether payment for returning to school would influence their decisions (see Appendix B). Of those indicating they would go back, most of them indicated they would go back without pay, Table 8. In fact, payment for attending school seemed to make a difference to relatively small minorities of these dropouts, which suggests rather clearly that something other than money is preventing them from going back to school.

Summary of Findings

The major results of our analysis on factors influencing Mexican American teenage dropouts to leave school and their orientations toward further education are summarized in outline form below.

Reasons for Dropping Out

(a) School related factors and financial reasons were subjectively perceived to be most important as reasons for dropping out; girls put slightly more emphasis on the former and boys on the latter.

(b) Few respondents indicated the following as important reasons for dropping out: social pressure from inside (teacher, principal, or students) or outside (family, friends) the school and marriage.

Social Pressure to Stay in or Return to School

(a) Few respondents received encouragement from any source to remain in school but, after leaving, most of them experienced social pressures from various sources to return to school.

(b) The few experiencing pressure to remain in school usually named parents as the source. However, in reference to returning to school, pressures came from a wider variety of sources.

Educational Aspirations and Expectations

(a) Aspirations of most of the dropouts were judged high relative to their situation. A majority of the youth, but more girls than boys, desired at least high school graduation.

(b) While the girls' expectations were similar to their aspirations, boys indicated markedly lower expectations than their aspirations.

(c) Most youth felt uncertain about attaining their anticipated education.

Attitudes Toward Re-entry

(a) Fewer youth, but still a majority, expressed a desire to re-enter school as compared with those indicating aspirations for further education.

(b) A substantial majority of youth did not anticipate re-entry, which is markedly inconsistent, particularly in reference to girls, relative to their status expectations.

(c) Of those desiring or expecting to re-enter school, boys were about equally split between attending school full-time or part-time; however, girls tended to favor part-time attendance.

(d) Payment of funds for returning to school appeared to influence only a small number of youth regarding their desires and prospects for re-entry.

Discussion

Perhaps the most significant contribution of this paper is in the nature of empirical description, for it provides the first set of relatively comprehensive empirical information about Mexican American dropouts. It is obvious that any conclusions we might draw from our investigation are tenuous because of the lack of corroborative data--there is a definite need for studies to replicate and extend the scope of our investigation. At the same time, even given these limitations, our results do have some significance in evaluating the general validity of conclusions which have evolved from accumulated findings of past research on high school dropouts.

Evidence from this study indicates that Mexican American dropouts do not differ substantially from dropouts in general in regard to important factors associated with quitting school, i.e., age and grade at dropping out and reasons

important to the decision to drop out. The accumulated evidence on age and grade, including our own study, would appear to indicate there is a definite pattern in age and grade at which the status transition from student to dropout is made which may reflect compulsory minimum age requirements--most students drop out at age 16 and just prior to or during the 9th grade.[27] Generalizations derived from past research indicate that school related and financial considerations are the most salient reasons given for leaving school,[28] and our results show that this general statement is also true for Mexican American dropouts. In reference to more specific reasons, however, the Mexican American dropouts did differ from the others in certain respects. In contrast to inferences in the literature that the peer group plays an important role in the decision to drop out,[29] peers did not appear to influence the decision of the Mexican American dropouts to much extent. Also, our results indicate that Mexican American girls are not as likely as other girls to give marriage as a prime reason for leaving school.[30]

Unfortunately, there is little of substance from past research on dropouts to compare with our findings on status projections and orientations toward re-entry into school. Our results are similar to those of an earlier study on Canadian dropouts, indicating that most aspire to at least complete high school.[31] Further research is needed to determine if such aspirations constitute a universal for American dropouts. In regard to educational plans, our findings on Mexican American dropouts differ from the small amount of relevant data on other dropouts [32] in that substantially more of our respondents expected to return to school. Our findings on status projections clearly challenge assertions by Anderson and Johnson that little value is placed on formal education in the Mexican American culture.[33]

In a theoretical sense, we are concerned with a critical and, in our society, abnormal status sequence. Becoming a dropout in our society involves a status transformation from student to school dropout, clearly a case of negative social mobility. Evidence for this inference is contained in the finding that a vast majority of the respondents indicated social pressure from a variety of sources encouraging them to return to school, even though they received little encouragement to remain in school before they dropped out. What is more, the fact that many of the students both desired a higher level of educational attainment and to re-enter school indicates that a large number are dissatisfied with their current position.

Our results have obvious policy implications, at least for Mexican American youth from rural areas. These implications revolve around two basic questions: how can we retain potential dropouts in our educational structures, and what can we do to facilitate individual development and social mobility for those who have become dropouts? Perhaps our most significant finding was the observation that very few dropouts received encouragement to stay in school before they made the decision to leave. The obvious implication of this is that potential dropouts should be identified as early as possible and that teachers, principals, and counselors could make more of an attempt to encourage these potential losers to remain in school. The fact that many of the students reported poor grades and lack of appreciation for the school programs as motives for leaving the school would certainly indicate that much more could be done in terms of developing programs suited to their perceived needs.

Our evidence clearly indicates that many dropouts <u>want</u> more formal education and even that many <u>anticipate</u> improving their educational status. Given this favorable orientation toward further education, considered in conjunction with

evidence that these youth were receiving widespread pressure to return to school and were not held by marital or job commitments, one cannot help wondering why they have not returned to school and why such a large number do not anticipate returning. Obviously, this problem will require additional investigation; however, several hypotheses come to mind as possible leads. Our evidence indicates that at least a substantial minority of our youth, particularly girls, would come back to school on a part-time basis if such a possibility existed. We think that this clearly indicates the need to develop evening or weekend programs, specifically oriented for the part-time involvement of dropouts. What is more, this might be the best route to take even for those who would like to come back on a full-time basis, for the embarrassment and ridicule and the psychological cost of a negative self-image associated with re-entering the normal school program is probably too great a burden for most to bear. In addition, as several social scientists have observed, careful thought should be given to adapting educational programs and developing educational structures specifically for the needs of the dropouts, for those who have failed to adjust to existing patterns and fail to appreciate existing courses will in all probability fail to adjust upon re-entry.

It is our judgement that unless something is done soon to ameliorate the number of Mexican American youth going through the negative status transformation of becoming dropouts, and/or something is done to alleviate the negative consequences of attaining this status label, we can expect increasing social stresses and group cleavages as evidenced in the recent emergence of MAYO and events similar to the "Del Rio Proclamation".

FOOTNOTES

1. From the dust cover and introductory statement of Lucius F. Cervantes' book, The Dropout: Causes Plus Cures (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1966). This book provides as comprehensive a multifaceted exploration of the dropout problem as exists and courageously offers suggestions for amelioration. Other thought provoking efforts on this subject can be found in articles by Edgar Friedenberg, Paul Goodman, S.M. Miller, and Frank Reissman in a very recent collection on the dropout edited by Daniel Schrieber, Profile of the School Dropout (New York: Random House, 1967).

2. Schreiber, Ibid., p. 4. Definition of term dropout: "A pupil who leaves school, for any reason except death, before graduation or completion of a program of studies and without transferring to another school." D.L. Schreiber, B.A. Kaplan and R.D. Strom, Dropout Studies: Design and Conduct (Washington, D.C.: National Educational Association, Project on School Dropouts, 1965), pp. 72-73.

3. In evidence, see statements by Schreiber, op. cit., pp. 4-6, and Cervantes, op. cit., pp. 1-10.

4. Ibid.

5. Cervantes, op. cit., p. 1.

6. An associate, who holds an administrative position in a state department of corrections, maintains that the vast majority of men behind bars are school dropouts and can not make a good adjustment to the "outside" unless they receive extensive supplementary education and training.

7. Cervantes, op. cit., p. 5.

8. U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Education, The Educational Problem of the Mexican-American (Washington, D.C.: the Department, October, 1966), p. 2. There is little question that in terms of normal SES indicators the Mexican Americans represent one of the most disadvantaged minorities in our society. For evidence, see, among others: Helen Rowan, "The Mexican American", paper prepared for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights--1968, p. 38; C.S. Heller, Mexican-American Youth: Forgotten Youth at the Crossroads (New York: Random House, 1966), pp. 14-16; James G. Anderson and William H. Johnson, "Sociocultural Determinants of Achievements Among Mexican American Students: An Interim Report of the Mathematics Education Program", Prepared for National Conference of Educational Opportunities for Mexican Americans (Austin, Texas: April 25-26, 1968), p. 1; and Joan W. Moore, Mexican-Americans: Problems and Prospects (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin, 1966), p. 1.

9. Heller, op. cit., pp. 51-52.

10. A synthesis of many of these occur in the recent book by Cervantes, op. cit., in articles included in the book of readings by Schreiber, op. cit., and in Sherrell E. Varner, Research Summary 1967-S1: School Dropouts (Washington, D.C.: National Educational Association, Research Division, 1967), p. 47.

11. United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, School and Early Employment Experience of Youth, Bulletin No. 1277 (Washington, D.C.: the Department, August, 1960); Seymour L. Wolfbein, "Transition from School to Work: A Study of the School Leaver", The Personnel and Guidance Journal, 38 (October, 1959), pp. 98-105; R.A. Tessener and L.M. Tessener, "Review of the Literature on School Dropouts", The Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, 42 (May, 1958), pp. 141-153.

12. The following studies indicate reasons for leaving school given by dropouts: National Education Association, Research Division and Department of Classroom Teachers, High School Dropouts, Discussion Pamphlet No. 3 (Washington, D.C.: the Association, Revised September, 1959); United States Department of Health Education, and Welfare, Office of Education, Retention in High Schools in Large Cities, Bulletin No. 15 (Washington, D.C.: the Department, 1957); United States Department of Labor, op. cit.; Wolfbein, op. cit.; Paul H. Bowman and Charles V. Matthews, Motivations of Youth for Leaving School (Quincy, Illinois: University of Chicago, Quincy Youth Development Project, 1960); Donald W. Chaloupka, An Analysis of Factors Related to Early School Leaving of Nebraska City High School, Nebraska City, Nebraska (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, Inc., 1958); Harold J. Dillon, Early School Leavers, A Major Educational Problem (New York: National Child Labor Committee, 1949); Parlett L. Moore, "Factors Involved in Student Elimination from High School", Journal of Negro Education. 23 (Spring, 1954), pp. 117-122; Virgil Murk, "A Follow-up Study on Students Who Drop Out of High School", The Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary-School Principals, 44 (February, 1960), pp. 73-75; Walter Patterson, "What Are the Major Causes of Student Dropouts and What Should the School Do About the Present Condition?", The Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary-School Principals, 39 (April, 1955), pp. 84-87; Research Division, Board of Education, Syracuse, New York, Syracuse Youth Who Did Not Graduate: A Study of Youth Who Withdrew from School Before High School Graduation, 1945-1949 (Syracuse: The Board of Education, 1950); Daniel W. Snepp, "Why They Drop Out", The Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary-School Principals, 35 (October, 1951), pp. 137-141; J. Armand Lanier, "A Guidance-Faculty Study of Student Withdrawals", Journal of Educational Research, 43 (November, 1949), pp. 205-212.

13. Harold C. Hand, "Do School Costs Drive Out the Youth of the Poor?" Progressive Education, 28 (January, 1951), pp. 89-93; Joe M. Young, "Lost, Strayed, or Stolen", The Clearing House, 29 (October, 1954, pp. 89-92); Weldon Brewer, "Why Did They Quit?" Education Digest, 15 (September, 1949), pp. 30-31.

14. Bowman, op. cit.; Dillon, op. cit.; L.A. Van Dyke and K.B. Hoyt, The Dropout Problem in Iowa High Schools (Iowa City: State University of Iowa College of Education, 1958).

15. Ibid.; Murk, op. cit.; U.S. Department of Labor, op. cit.; Wolfbein, op. cit.

16. E.F. Sharp and G.A. Kristjanson, Manitoba High School Students and Dropouts: Their Educational and Occupational Goals (Manitoba Department of Agriculture, Economics and Publications Branch).

17. E.G. Youmans, The Educational Attainment and Future Plans of Kentucky Rural Youths (Lexington: Kentucky Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin 664, January, 1959).

18. U.S. Department of Labor, op. cit.

19. Cervantes, op. cit., p. 201.

20. Heller, op. cit., p. 51.

21. For a description of this larger study, see Kuvlesky, Wright, and Juarez, Status Projections and Ethnicity: A Comparison of Mexican American, Negro, and Anglo Youth. Paper presented at the annual meetings of the Southwestern Sociological Association, 1969, Houston, Texas.

22. We wish to acknowledge the importance of the assistance of Pedro Garza, now a graduate student at Princeton, for his invaluable assistance in locating these respondents and stimulating a climate of cooperativeness among them that made our interviewing much easier than it otherwise would have been.

23. We wish to acknowledge our indebtedness to Rumaldo Juarez, then a graduate student at Texas A&M, and Jorge Trevino, then a high school student in Rio Grande City, for the roles they played in initiating contacts with the respondents and performing a translation function when it was required. Without the help of these men, we would have had much less success in gaining the cooperation of prospective respondents.

24. Of the 82 youth that were interviewed, 8 were deleted from the study because (1) they had completed 11 or more years of school; (2) they were enrolled in school at the time of the interview; or (3) they were not of Spanish-American descent.

25. In each case the interviewer gave a written report on his evaluation of the interview situation, including his evaluation of the validity of responses to each question. In reference to questions utilized in the analysis reported here, the evaluations of the interviewers in terms of validity of responses were, in almost all cases, very positive.

26. Wolfbein, op. cit.

27. Ibid.; U.S. Department of Labor, op. cit.; Tessener, op. cit.

28. See review of literature and relevant studies listed in footnote 12.

29. Cervantes, op. cit.

30. Chaloupka, op. cit.; Murk, op. cit.; Snepp, op. cit.

31. Sharp, op. cit.

32. Youmans, op. cit.

33. Anderson and Johnson, op. cit.

APPENDIX A

CHARACTERISTICS AND BACKGROUND OF RESPONDENTS

Table 1. Location and Number of Dropouts Used in South Texas Study

Location	Number
Maverick County	26
Eagle Pass	22
Quemado	3
El Indio	1
Dimmit County	13
Carrizo Springs	5
Big Wells	1
Asherton	7
Zapata County	11
Zapata	4
San Ygnacio	7
Starr County	24
Rio Grande City	13
Salineno	1
Roma	3
San Isidro	4
Delmita	3
TOTAL	74

Table 2. Selected Indicators of Socio-Economic Conditions in the South Texas Study Counties Compared with Texas and the United States

Place	Total Population (Thousands)	Mexican Americans (Percent)	Low-Income Families[A] (Percent)	Median Family Income	Median School Yrs. Comp.[B]	Unskilled Lab. For.[C] (Percent)	Agr. Lab. For.[D] (Percent)
Dimmit	10	67.0	59.7	$2,480	5	61.8	38.3
Maverick	15	77.6	58.0	2,523	6	47.5	19.4
Starr	17	88.7	71.4	1,700	5	50.4	41.0
Zapata	4	74.8	65.5	1,766	5	54.6	39.0
Texas	9,580	14.8	28.8	4.884	10	36.5	7.8
United States	179,323	1.9	21.4	5,657	11	37.5	6.0

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, U.S. Census of Population: 1960, Volume 1, Characteristics of the Population, Part 1, United States Summary, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1964, Tables 42, 76, 87, and 95; and Part 45, Texas, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963, Tables 14, 28, 47, 57, 66, 84, 86, and 87.

[A]Annual family income below $3,000.

[B]Persons 25 years old and over.

[C]Males and females classified as operatives and kindred, private household workers, service workers, farm laborers and farm foremen, and other laborers.

[D]Males and females classified as farmers, farm managers, farm laborers, and farm foremen.

Table 3. Age of Mexican American Dropouts at Time of Interview

	Male (N=39)	Female (N=35)	Total (N=74)
	Percent		
Age 13 or less	0	0	0
Age 14	3	0	1
Age 15	8	6	7
Age 16	15	6	11
Age 17	31	20	26
Age 18	20	31	26
Age 19	20	23	21
Age 20 or more	3	14	8
TOTAL	100	100	100
MEAN	17.3	18.0	17.6

Table 4. Age at which Mexican American Dropouts Quit School

	Male (N=39)	Female (N=35)	Total (N=74)
	Percent		
13 years or less	5	3	4
14 years	18	17	18
15 years	15	6	11
16 years	28	20	24
17 years	26	34	30
18 years	8	20	13
TOTAL	100	100	100
MEAN	15.8	16.3	16.0

$x^2 = 4.72$ d.f. = 4 $P > .30 < .50$

Collapsed first two categories in chi square calculations.

Table 5. Highest School Grade Completed by Mexican American Dropouts

	Male (N=39)	Female (N=35)	Total (N=74)
	----------Percent----------		
Sixth Grade or less	25	9	18
Seventh Grade	10	20	15
Eighth Grade	23	17	20
Ninth Grade	39	28	34
Tenth Grade	3	26	13
TOTAL	100	100	100
MEAN	7.9	8.4	8.1

$x^2 = 12.41$ d.f. = 4 $P > .01 < .02$

Table 6. Marital Status of Parents at the Time Mexican American Dropouts Left School

	Male (N=39)	Female (N=35)	Total (N=74)
	----------Percent----------		
Both alive, living together	77	71	74
Both alive, separated or divorced	8	17	12
One or both parents not living	15	12	14
TOTAL	100	100	100

Table 7. Person(s) Mexican American Dropouts Were Living with at the Time of Interview

	Male (N=39)	Female (N=35)	Total (N=74)
	Percent		
Both parents	72	63	68
Mother or father	16	17	18
Person other than parents	9	20	13
No information	3	0	1
TOTAL	100	100	100

Table 8. Level of Formal Education Attained by Father of Mexican American Dropouts

	Male (N=39)	Female (N=35)	Total (N=74)
	Percent		
Did not go to school	13	8	11
Eighth Grade or less	47	49	47
Some high school	15	11	14
High school graduate	0	0	0
High school graduate plus additional training	0	0	0
College graduate	0	0	0
Don't know	20	29	24
No information	5	3	4
TOTAL	100	100	100

Table 9. Level of Formal Education Attained by Mothers of Mexican American Dropouts

	Male (N=39)	Female (N=35)	Total (N=74)
	Percent		
Did not go to school	15	20	18
Eighth Grade or less	44	40	42
Some high school	15	11	13
High school graduate	3	6	4
High school graduate plus additional training	0	0	0
College graduate	0	0	0
Don't know	18	20	19
No information	5	3	4
TOTAL	100	100	100

Table 10. Occupation of Main Breadwinner in Families of Mexican American Dropouts

	Male (N=39)	Female (N=35)	Total (N=74)
	Percent		
Unemployed, Housewife	10	10	11
Unskilled labor	31	34	32
Operatives	18	20	19
Skilled blue collar	18	9	13
Clerical and Sales work	5	9	7
Farm or ranch owner	5	9	7
Professional and managerial (other than farm)	8	9	8
No information	5	0	3
TOTAL	100	100	100

Table 11. Technical Training of Mexican American Dropouts Since Leaving School

	Male (N=39)	Female (N=35)	Total (N=74)
	Percent		
None	72	74	73
With Job Corps	3	6	4
With Neighborhood Youth Corps	7	20	14
With other organizations or businesses	15	0	8
No Information	3	0	1
TOTAL	100	100	100

Table 12. Type of Technical Training of Mexican American Dropouts Since Leaving School

	Male (N=39)	Female (N=35)	Total (N=74)
	Percent		
No technical training	72	74	73
Laborer	10	26	18
Skilled trade, craft, or work	13	0	7
Machine operator	3	0	1
No information	2	0	1
TOTAL	100	100	100

Table 13. Language Spoken by Mexican American Dropouts with Parents and Friends

	Language Spoken With Parents			Language Spoken With Friends in Neighborhood			Language Spoken With Friends at Work		
	Male (N=39)	Female (N=34)	Total (N=73)	Male (N=39)	Female (N=34)	Total (N=73)	Male (N=39)	Female (N=34)	Total (N=73)
	Percent								
English	3	0	1	3	21	11	15	27	21
Spanish	77	71	74	69	35	53	44	20	33
Abouth the same amount of both	20	29	25	28	44	36	36	50	42
No information	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	3	4
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 14. Place of Residence of Mexican American Dropouts

	Male (N=39)	Female (N=35)	Total (N=74)
	----------Percent----------		
City (over 2,500)	43	41	42
Town or village (under 2,500)	31	28	30
In the country, but not on a farm	6	18	12
On a farm	20	13	16
TOTAL	100	100	100

APPENDIX B

EXCERPTS FROM RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

Reasons for Leaving School

We would like to know about your reasons for leaving school. How important were each of the following things in your reasons for leaving school? (Circle one number for each reason.)

Reason	Importance			
	Much	Some	Little	None
	4	3	2	1
Couldn't get along with the teachers.				

(See Table 1 for remaining reasons.)

Educational Aspiration

If you could have as much schooling as you desired, which of the following would you do? (Circle only one number):

1. Never go to school again.
2. Complete high school.
3. Complete a business, commercial, electronics, or some other technical program after finishing high school.
4. Graduate from a junior college (2 years).
5. Graduate from a college or university.
6. Complete additional studies after graduating from a college or university.

Educational Expectation

What do you really expect to do about your education? (Circle only one number):

1. Never to go to school again.
2. Complete high school.
3. Complete a business, commercial, electronics, or some other technical program after finishing high school.
4. Graduate from a junior college (2 years).
5. Graduate from a college or university.
6. Complete additional studies after graduating from a college or university.

How certain are you that you will really achieve the education you expect?

I am: (Circle one number.)

1	2	3	4	5
Very Certain	Certain	Not very Certain	Uncertain	Very Uncertain

Desire for Re-entry

Would you like to go back and finish high school sometime?

_____YES _____NO

If yes, would like to go back as:

full-time student_____
part-time student_____

Expectation for Re-entry

Do you really think you will ever go back to high school and try to graduate:

_____YES _____NO

If yes, do you think you will go back as:

full-time student_____
part-time student_____

Conditions Under Which Would Return to School

Under what conditions would you go back and finish high school?

(a) As a full-time student (Circle one item):

1 Wouldn't go back under any conditions.
2 Would go back without being paid for it.
3 Would only go back if paid for it. How much? $_____/week.

(b) As a part-time student (Circle one item):

1 Wouldn't go back under any conditions.
2 Would go back without being paid for it.
3 Would go back if paid for it. How much? $_____/week.

Encouragement

Did anybody ever try to talk you out of leaving school?

_____YES _____NO

If you answered YES, Who?

Has anybody tried to talk you into going back to school?

_____YES _____NO

If you answered YES, Who?